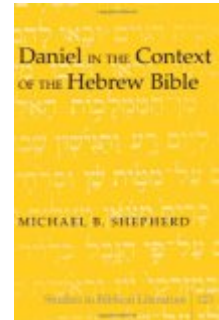




Michael B. Shepherd. *Daniel in the Context of the Hebrew Bible.* New York: Peter Lang, 2009. 163 pp. \$39.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4331-0539-5.



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"This book is not the usual sort of commentary on the book of Daniel." This opening statement in the introduction of this book is certainly true. The structure of the book is both curious and confusing. After a brief introduction that raises the question, "What is the Old Testament?" and explores the process of canonical formation, the first three chapters of the book are devoted to explorations of the Pentateuch (Torah), Prophets (Nevi'im), and a portion of the Writings (Kethuvim). Chapter 4 consists of the commentary on Daniel followed by chapter 5 on Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, and the New Testament. The book concludes with two appendices, a short essay on Hermeneutics, and the author's translation of Daniel.

The title of this book suggests a work focused on the place of Daniel in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh). I was puzzled by the structure of the book until I realized that the author was following the canonical ordering of the Masoretic Text (MT) in his construction of this book. Thus the reflections on Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles are locat-

ed after the commentary on Daniel. The inclusion of brief remarks on the New Testament provided another clue to the author's intention. In the introduction, Shepherd notes that "the composition of the Hebrew Bible ... is messianic, eschatological and faith-oriented (pp. 5-6). This is affirmed in the final chapter: "Jesus and the New Testament authors agree. The Hebrew Bible is messianic, eschatological, and faith-oriented" (p. 118). The stated goal of this book is to "read the book of Daniel within the context of the Hebrew Bible as a whole" (p. 1). It is clear from the structure of the book that the author's purpose is oriented towards his theological perspective, thus the inclusion of analysis concerning the relationship of Daniel and New Testament texts. More than half of this slim volume consists of an argument for a unified theological reading of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. This of course is one of the tasks of biblical theologians and not directly related to writing a commentary on Daniel. The quest for an overarching theological construct of the message of the entire Bible has resulted in mas-

sive tomes throughout the centuries. Recent biblical scholarship argues for the polyvalence of biblical texts, the presence of multiple voices and viewpoints. Shepherd credits the work of others (for example, John H. Sailhamer) in his presentation of an overall unified theme of the Bible. One can agree or disagree with this analysis, but it does set the context for his approach to the text of Daniel.

Shepherd's commentary on Daniel provides a brief review of each chapter with an emphasis on the intertextual connections between Daniel and other biblical texts. This type of analysis accords with his emphasis of a unified theme to the biblical texts. Those interested in identifying such themes will find this analysis interesting and helpful. However, such an approach has a tendency to gloss over the contested history of interpretation of this text. The book of Daniel has been an interpretive morass throughout the centuries because of the presence of two languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) and two genres (court tales and apocalyptic visions) that do not coincide with each other, as well as internal historical references that raise the issue of dating the book. Shepherd briefly summarizes the various issues, arguing that the Hebrew sections function as commentary on the Aramaic section and that the issues of dating the book cannot be definitively answered, thus a range of dates between the sixth and second centuries BCE are possible. These conclusions are appropriately cautious and judicious considering the ongoing debate concerning these questions in Daniel studies. Those interested in a fuller analysis of such issues will find commentaries such as John J. Collins's contribution to the *Hermeneia* series to be more helpful.

Overall, this volume would be most helpful to those interested in a brief presentation of topics in the book of Daniel and the possible theological connections between Daniel and other biblical texts. My assessment of this book is that theological concerns for the unity of the biblical message

and how Daniel fits within that framework tend to gloss over the very real interpretive conundrums of this text. While historical, literary, and text-critical issues are briefly considered, these concerns are not the focus of this book and one would need to consult other sources for a full exploration of these issues. The title of the book suggests a study of Daniel solely in the context of the Hebrew Bible, but it would have been more accurate to use a title such as "Daniel in the Context of the Jewish and Christian Bibles" given the content of the book. One further comment. The book of Daniel, of course, is often read for its connection with the apocalyptic text of the book of Revelation in the New Testament, resulting in readings of these texts popularized by novels such as the *Left Behind* series. The *Left Behind* phenomenon (leftbehind.com) is the most recent extensive popularization of one branch of Christian theological reflection that reads the apocalyptic texts of the Bible as being especially relevant to the current age, the End Times. Shepherd's analysis of Daniel, connecting Daniel thematically with other texts of the Bible, can counteract the atomistic reading of these texts as being simply conduits of information for "those in the know," for the final generation before the ultimate judgment and end of the world. Shepherd's book provides a basic introduction to some ways to read the book of Daniel in relationship to larger themes found throughout the Bible. Readers should be aware that there is a larger conversation around the book of Daniel that recognizes the complexity and the contested issues that are part of the fascinating history of this small twelve-chapter piece of literature.

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